

ADDRESS BY
HON. D. GOKHOOL, MINISTER OF
INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

OFFICIAL LAUNCHING
OF THE
FASHION AND DESIGN INSTITUTE

TUESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 2009

AT 18 30 HRS

FOM Exhibition Centre
Freeport Operations (Mauritius) Ltd,
Freeport Zone 7, Mer Rouge

Honourable Ministers/Hon R. Jeetah- Minister of Health and Quality of Life

Permanent Secretaries

Mr. Francois de Grivel, Chairman of the Board of the Fashion and Design Institute

Mrs Julie King, CEO – FDI

Board members of the Institute

Chairmen and Directors

Members of the Media

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening and welcome.

We are gathered here this evening for a very special occasion: The official launching of the Fashion and Design Institute (FDI) and the unveiling of the Logo of FDI.

Milestone

The establishment of this Institute marks yet another important milestone in the implementation of the Government Programme 2005-2010. It should be recalled that the creation of this institution was announced in Government Programme 2005-2010 – well before the present financial and economic crisis hit our economy. The FDI Bill went to Parliament in May 2008 and today the Institute is being launched officially.

Let me at the very outset place on record my deep appreciation to everyone to has contributed to make this project a reality. A special mention for my colleague Minister Jeetah, and. in particular, our Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam for his unflinching support.

Why an FDI?

Why an FDI? There are several reasons. Mauritius has embarked on a major transformational process of its economy and its society. Having gone through a regime of preferences and protectionism over nearly five decades, Mauritius has now to engage the battle for global competitiveness and excellence in an increasingly open New Economic Order.

We are now confronted with new complex and unprecedented challenges. Increasingly this New World Economy is being driven by knowledge, talents, creativity, innovation and entrepreneurialism. But unlike many countries, we have not been blessed with natural resources, which can be an important factor in underpinning economic development.

The world is becoming a global market. Trade liberalisation has increased competitive pressures in the market place. This situation is affecting the pattern of production and trade world wide.

We now have to position ourselves as a global player, integrate the global value change and reach out for high- value, niche markets with differentiated products and services.

We have to realize that where once capital and labor gave us value, now talents, creativity and innovation are the most precious resources on the planet and the basis for competitive advantages. Where once efficiencies in production gave us profits, jobs and taxes, now it is the ability to continuously design and innovate that will generate increasing wealth in society. And where once research & development, and the most advanced universities were concentrated in the West, they are now spread more evenly around the world—and so is innovation.

The 21st century is the century of knowledge-based societies. It is clear that countries that have focused on innovation and development of creative capabilities have become more advanced and successful economies.

In its ambition to move to the next level of its development, Mauritius stands at an important crossroad and runs the risk of witnessing the divide widen with such countries, if we do not constantly re-invent ourselves and move up the global-value chain.

Our only option is to continuously and increasingly rely more on intangible factors such as knowledge, creativity and innovation.

Reforms

In the face of tremendous adversities arising out of our small size and isolation and the absence of natural resources, we have been able to forge ahead by adopting appropriate policies and leveraging on the opportunities available.

Major reforms have been engaged and the architecture for a new Mauritius is already being sketched. Sustaining our development entails building our competitive advantages through the addition of knowledge and services that help differentiate, innovate and build an attractive image. Knowledge and services are, therefore, gaining prominence in global trade

To further consolidate our economy and move to the next level of development now, we have no option than to continue being bold and daring and think out of the box. We have now to look for new sources of growth. We have to rely more on our human ingenuity to find innovative and new pathways for move forward.

Mauritius is the land of diversity and diversity is the ideal breeding ground for creativity and innovation through the cross-fertilization of ideas from different disciplines. **Fragmentation and exclusion should give way to convergence and inclusion.** Why should computers, the Sciences and the Classics and the Arts look in opposite directions? If we look carefully, we shall see the early signs of such a movement in the Mauritian landscape. This is most encouraging and needs to be nurtured. To sustain and deepen this momentum, there is need for creating **convergence** of these various initiatives to nurture creativity and innovation as part of our national culture through an appropriate institutional arrangement.

The pace of change we are witnessing requires adequate, appropriate and timely response from our part, in terms of sharpening our minds, honing our skills, building our strategic thinking capabilities, problem solving and fostering creativity.

The FDI

The setting up of the Fashion and Design Institute forms part of our strategic response to the new challenges on our horizon.

The establishment of this new institution is the outcome a study and consultations with stakeholders. A Report on the Establishment of a Fashion and Design Institute was prepared by a consultant, with the assistance of UNIDO. Wide ranging consultations were held with key stakeholders. Finally, the Fashion and Design Institute Act was enacted to provide a legal framework for the establishment and operation of the Institute

As you may be aware, the setting up of the Institute has entailed the merger of the Department of Textile of the University of Mauritius, the IVTB School of Design and the Textile and Apparel Development Centre of Enterprise Mauritius. These units were established at different points of time and there were probably good reasons at that time to establish them.

But circumstances are no longer the same, and we have to keep pace with the forces of change. The co-existence of three units doing more or less similar activities and missions is an indication of a fragmented approach and a lack of strategic focus. There is certainly no rationale to have parallel institutions, which leads to duplication of efforts and waste of resources. We have to consider such critical factors as coherence, coordination, synergy with the beneficiary enterprises and cost-effectiveness. Bringing together units operating under different bodies, I am sure, has not been an easy task. But it is obvious that one has to build on what already exists.

In fact, an institution dedicated to developing the creativity and talents of Mauritian entrepreneurs and promoting fashionable and differentiated products was long overdue. It is gratifying to note, therefore, that the Fashion and Design Institute is now taking shape under this government.

This is why we are excited at the marvelous things that this institution can do and will do.

We will have our students tuning their antenna to pick up the next 'big thing' across a broad range of industries and markets. We expect the institute to contribute towards the transformation of the textile and clothing industry, the largest sub-sector within manufacturing, into a fashion industry in order to continue to sell in markets today crowded with many low-cost suppliers. Our manufacturers should move up the value chain by adopting innovative practices and focusing on fashion, design and creativity to be globally competitive, that is both on the domestic and export market. . We all know that designing new models that offer new value will win the day and this will not end at our borders but will be global in its reach

It is obvious that to achieve this, industry will have to establish multi institutional and multidisciplinary teams, to integrate arts, science and technology as seamlessly as possible.

But beyond the manufacturing sector which will have to be reshaped , we place great hopes on the institute and we want it to produce students who will contribute to the emergence of a new culture of design that will have a qualitative impact on our way of life, at different levels of our society. The institute should be in the forefront of crafting this new spirit of innovation and aesthetic refinement .

I am told that the UNIDO consultant, during his mission in connection with the setting up of the Institute, had emphasised on the need to bring improvement in the design and lay out of our buildings and infrastructure and the main streets in the capital which will contribute to nurture design among the people. I have been informed that the institute has come up with a project for the upgrading of the Sir William Newton Street as one of its outreach projects. I wish this project well.

Design Hub

Design is about being generative, being transformative, maximizing not efficiencies but opportunities, seeing things with fresh eyes. It means creating products and services which combine unique design, aesthetics, exceptional craftsmanship and technical mastery.

The setting up of the FDI is just a beginning. But can Mauritius aspire to become a Design hub in this part of the world? From a longer term perspective the institute must aspire to become a Design University with its Design Park and bring under one umbrella such sectors like Architecture, Interior Design, Graphic Design, and Digital Arts, Product Design, Fashion Design, Furniture and Jewellery Design.

Singapore and Italy are good examples of high quality fashion and design. Italy has a strong culture of design and many of its cities such as Rome, Venice and Naples are famous for their historical buildings incorporating innovative designs. Can Mauritius aspire to attain such heights? There is no doubt that we have to create the right conditions in order to develop a culture of excellence in design and fashion in Mauritius.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The FDI will be called upon to be the institutional engine that will provide focus, directions and stimulate synergies for creativity and innovation to blossom.

New Programmes

Ladies and Gentlemen - Under the guidance of the FDI Board and its new CEO, the Institute will be running a number of new programmes as well as a few legacy courses and tailor-made Executive Development Programme.

A few of these programmes are:-

- (a) B.A. Interior Design
- (b) B.A. Graphic Design with Animation
- (c) Product Development

- (d) Merchandising
- (e) Industrial Pattern Drafting
- (f) Branding for Better Business Result

The Institute has an important mandate. It has been entrusted with the responsibility to promote excellence in the field of fashion and design technology, develop a multi-disciplinary approach in carrying out research and training in the field of fashion and design technology and provide educational, research, consultancy and training in the field of fashion and design.

It has been bestowed with the appropriate structure to provide responsive services for the economy as well as for society at large. It will also be endowed with the required resources to discharge its responsibilities. It will also have the autonomy, flexibility and enhanced accountability to carry out its tasks.

Besides working with industry partners, the institute must leverage on other educational institution's strengths and resources for example the MGI School of Fine Arts. It must take advantage on the competencies of other institutions and venture outside their home ground also become partners with other institutions outside Mauritius and build more depth and global reach. It will be able to attract brand name companies and other universities and design institutions as partners overseas.

I know that initiatives have already been taken in this direction. Such alliances are not only for building up an international brand name, but also in providing each other with additional resources to grow. Such linkage is vital to our efforts to become a vibrant knowledge-driven economy.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Before ending, let me pay tribute to all those in the public and the private sector who have been involved in the conceptualisation and establishment of this institution.

I am confident that this new institute will mark a new phase in our development path. It will contribute significantly to our quest for new knowledge and foster creativity and innovation. The Fashion and Design Institute should become a think tank, a sounding board and open window for new ideas, *un berceau de la créativité et l'innovation dans le paysage mauricien.*

With these words, I thank you for your attention.

